

JUNE 15, 1972

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE
OF

DR. JAMES C. FLETCHER, DIRECTOR, NASA;
COLONEL CHARLES M. DUKE, JR.;
CAPTAIN JOHN W. YOUNG;
AND
COMMANDER THOMAS K. MATTINGLY, II
CREW OF APOLLO 16

THE BRIEFING ROOM

AT 12:47 P.M. EDT

MR. ZIEGLER: As you know, President Nixon met for about 20 minutes with the NASA Administrator, Dr. James Fletcher, and the three Apollo 16 astronauts, John Young, Charlie Duke, and Ken Mattingly. The Apollo 16 astronauts are in Washington to attend the state dinner tonight for President Echeverria.

You will recall that President Nixon invited the three astronauts to attend the dinner when he talked to them by phone shortly after they returned from the Apollo 16 mission.

Since their Apollo 16 mission, the astronauts have been traveling throughout the United States. By Saturday they will have visited some 21 cities in 13 States, and the District of Columbia.

Today Dr. Fletcher and the Apollo 16 astronauts talked to the President about the joint United States-USSR space agreement which was signed in Moscow on May 24th between the United States and the USSR and confirmed the scheduling of a joint rendezvous and docking mission in 1975 and opened up possibilities for a broad range of future cooperation in the space area.

Dr. Fletcher is here to discuss the joint rendezvous and docking mission with you and also the Apollo 16 astronauts can respond to some of your questions.

Dr. Fletcher.

DR. FLETCHER: Thank you, Ron.

We did have a very profitable discussion with the President primarily dealing with two things: The experiences of the Apollo 16 crew members, who are before you now, and also reviewing progress that we have made since the summit conference in the rendezvous and docking mission.

MORE

(OVER)

The President was very pleased with the progress, the response that was received from the Congress of the United States and the program for carrying out the whole mission. Everything seems to be going on schedule. We have kick-off meetings scheduled this July, as you probably know, with the principals, to try to iron out the management of it.

The President particularly wanted to emphasize that as far as the docking mission is concerned this is only the beginning of what he conceives as a long association with the Soviet Union in many other areas of space cooperation.

As you know, the agreement was a broad agreement and we are busy working on other kinds of things that we can do together. The President sees a long period of cooperation, perhaps through the turn of the century, doing things together, partly for reasons of doing it more economically, but partly because he feels strongly that the international aspect of this is important in improving relationships.

If we can do this together, we can do other things together.

Also, he wanted to emphasize it is not just the Soviet Union and ourselves who ought to cooperate in space but the whole world, and as you know, we are busily involved with other countries of the world. With the Skylab program we do have experiments planned that are placed there by European countries, and with the shuttle program we hope to have foreign astronauts, European, Japanese, Australians, Canadians, as well as East Europeans.

So, it is the start, you might say, of a long period of cooperation in the Soviet Union and he was pleased to have this report.

At this time, I would like to call upon Captain John Young, who will speak for the astronauts to give his impressions of the meeting.

CAPTAIN YOUNG: Thank you.

Thank you, Dr. Fletcher. It was really a pleasure to hear the President speak of this docking mission the way he did. You know the first step of a 1,000 mile journey needs that first step and I think from our standpoint this is really going to be a significant attempt to cooperate on an international scale with the Soviet Union.

I guess the three of us feel -- we know a couple or three or four cosmonauts and we don't think we are going to have any problem working with the cosmonauts. I do think that the real problem in the whole mission is that of communications, and once we solve that problem we can prove that we can work together in a lot of other areas besides.

MORE